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AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY, INC./KCET/WGBH/WNET

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Look Behind Kosovo's Struggle for Independence in P.O.V.'s "The Brooklyn Connection"

Story of How One Man Used U.S. Gun Laws
To Supply a Guerrilla Army Reveals Complexities of Global Politics

*Dutch Documentary Has U.S. Broadcast Premiere July 19 on PBS
In 18th Season of P.O.V. Series*

How do you tell a freedom fighter from a terrorist? If you met Florin Krasniqi in his Brooklyn neighborhood, you wouldn't likely think he was either. After hearing his story, you would certainly know he was one or the other – but which one? Krasniqi's tale, now told in the new P.O.V. documentary, **The Brooklyn Connection**, cuts to the heart of America's conflicted notions about "freedom fighters" and "terrorists" – and about Second Amendment protections in a post 9-11 world – becoming a point of contention between right and left, Republican and Democrat, and pro-Serb and pro-Albanian factions. The film also dramatizes how so many global political roads lead back to the U.S. – even, one might say, to the multi-ethnic populations of Brooklyn.

Dutch filmmaker Klaartje Quirijns' **The Brooklyn Connection** has its U.S. broadcast premiere, **Tuesday, July 19, 2005** at 10 p.m., as part of the 18th season of public television's P.O.V. series. P.O.V. continues on Tuesdays at 10 p.m., through September 13 on PBS stations nationwide. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

Krasniqi didn't start out a political man. Though he came from one of the world's most fought-over regions – the Kosovo province of old Yugoslavia – the Brooklyn businessman was more focused on his prosperous American life than on festering legacies of Balkan political strife. A U.S. citizen and owner of a roofing company, Krasniqi's most characteristic posture was at the backyard barbecue. That changed in 1997. Florin's cousin, Adrian, was killed in an attack on the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army, as conflict between Kosovo's Albanian majority and its Serbian rulers escalated into war – and to charges and counter-charges of "terrorism" and "ethnic cleansing." Florin's return for Adrian's funeral proved a shattering experience. He dedicated himself to bringing about the Kosovo Albanians' long-frustrated dream of self-determination.

But Krasniqi did not turn away from America. On the contrary, as graphically illustrated in **The Brooklyn Connection**, Krasniqi returned to the U.S. intent on using all the country's freedoms – above all its permissive gun laws – to outfit a guerrilla army. On one level, **The Brooklyn Connection**'s tale of how Krasniqi raised and spent \$30 million to arm and supply the upstart Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), whose resistance to Serbian dominance forced NATO and the UN to

intervene, is a straightforward and remarkably candid account. But the historical and political background to Florin's personal epiphany, and the consequences for peace in the Balkans of his subsequent actions, are anything but clear-cut.

Enmity between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo has deep roots. While the province is the ancient heartland of Serbia, the population over time has shifted to an Albanian majority. Both sides lay historic claim to the land – a conflict that broke out with new ferocity as Communist Yugoslavia disintegrated in the 1990s. Standing before the farmhouse where he grew up, Krasniqi explains from his side just how personal this history remains. Built by his family in the early 1800s, the house was burned first by Turks in 1896 – even though the Krasniqis were and are Muslim – then four times by Serbs between 1913 and 1999. Rebuilt each time, it was joined by other houses as the farm was divided among generations of Krasniqis. After 200 years, the family is still there. As devoted to his American life as Florin may be, it's clear his roots aren't going anywhere.

In the film, the Brooklyn roofer is first encountered on the final leg of the arms network he helped build. It is the one clearly illegal stretch – smuggling the arms over the mountains from Albania into Kosovo. But it is back in the U.S. where Krasniqi's story shows its more curious dimensions. Florin is a cheerful, articulate, unapologetic guide to his supply operation, emphasizing all the way that his actions are carried on legally. Despite security concerns caused by 9-11, America remains one of the easiest places in the world to acquire military arms, as well as other military goods, such as uniforms.

As he makes his round of gun dealers and military surplus marts – and despite his confidence that his actions are legal – Krasniqi doesn't hesitate to lie to grease the wheels. He tells a bemused gun shop owner that a high-tech assault rifle he's buying is for hunting elephants. In fact, in the hands of a sniper, it can blow someone's head off from a mile away. At right-wing gun markets, Krasniqi describes the Kosovar struggle as a fight against Communists. Krasniqi and his friends have set up legally affiliated gun clubs in the U.S. and Albania to facilitate export of the weapons. It's a pretext good enough to bluff intercepting governments, such as the Italian, which must have believed Krasniqi's gun club story as much as the shop owner believed his elephant-hunting story.

Krasniqi and the Muslim Albanian immigrant community in the U.S. have taken their struggle beyond the battlefields, to the arena that may ultimately count most – the U.S. political process. Raising and donating money to political candidates, they seek access to argue the cause of Kosovo independence. As revealed by **The Brooklyn Connection**, they have lined up largely behind Democratic candidates, and are seen at a fundraiser with Wesley Clarke and Richard Holbrooke, both of whom served in Balkan politics under Clinton. Since the Serb American community supports President Bush and the Republicans, these scenes caused a ripple of "terrorism" recriminations during the last U.S. election when **The Brooklyn Connection** aired on Dutch TV.

All the while, Florin Krasniqi expresses wonder at the American liberties that allow him and other "American sons of Kosovo" to effect such a turn in history. Astoundingly, he takes his revelations in the film further. He's still buying arms, and the KLA is still hiding them – this time from NATO. Krasniqi reveals that the KLA's goal is no less than independence, a fight the group will ultimately resume with – or against – international peacekeepers. That's the grim news in **The Brooklyn Connection**. And while Krasniqi may celebrate American liberties, others may be left to wonder that a Constitutional Amendment guaranteeing a citizen's right keep and bear arms can be used to arm a guerrilla army in a foreign land – an army, in fact, that may end up fighting U.S. peacekeepers.

Based on material from Stacy Sullivan's book *Be Not Afraid, For You Have Sons in America*, **The Brooklyn Connection** is a remarkable behind-the-scenes look at global politics, U.S. gun laws, and recent Balkan turmoil.

“Though Kosovo has dropped from the headlines, the war there is far from over,” says director/co-producer Klaartje Quirijns. “Not only are the fundamental conflicts unresolved, but weapons are flowing steadily into the province. We wanted first to answer the question of where the arms were coming from. Then we wanted to explore the implications of that answer – that they were coming from U.S. sources even as the U.S. government was trying to mediate peace in the region.”

The Brooklyn Connection is a Quirijns/Amago/VPRO/Sullivan/'t Hart production, distributed by Films Transit International.

About the filmmaker:

Klaartje Quirijns Director/Co-Producer

Originally from the Netherlands, where she worked as a documentary director and producer for the leading public stations (VPRO, IKON and NPS), director/producer Klaartje Quirijns is currently based in New York. Her recent credits include **Brooklyn Dodgers**, about the legendary “bums” of baseball as well as **The Brooklyn Connection**. She is currently working on a feature documentary, **On the Couch**, which visualizes the ultimate modern city as a mental institution where everybody seems to have his or her own therapist. While pursuing independent documentary projects, Quirijns continues to work as a correspondent for Dutch national radio and television.

Credits:

Executive Producers: George Brugmans, Klaartje Quirijns
Producers: Klaartje Quirijns, Stacy Sullivan, Martijn 't Hart
Director: Klaartje Quirijns
Editor: Katharina Wartena, Rob Fruchtman
Cinematographer: Martijn 't Hart

Running Time: 56:46

Awards & Festivals:

- Tribeca Film Festival, 2005
- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, 2005
- IDFA Festival, 2004



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 18th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 220 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V. is available online at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique *Talking Back* feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. *Youth Views*, P.O.V.'s youth engagement initiative, expands these efforts by working directly with youth service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Educational Foundation of America, the Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television station including KCET/Los Angeles, WGBH/Boston, and WNET/New York. Cara Mertes is executive director of P.O.V./American Documentary, Inc.



Support for P.O.V. is provided by Starbucks Coffee Company. Starbucks has a rich tradition of supporting the arts and independent film and celebrates the fact that numerous points of view can be discussed over a good cup of coffee. Starbucks is committed to offering the highest quality coffee in grocery stores nationwide.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.americandocumentary.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on-line and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

TAPE REQUESTS: *Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.*